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ABSTRACT

The Parent-Teacher-Student Network Model was developed to aid in development of open communication among parent, teachers, and students. A description is given of this model for parent-teacher-student conferencing which was designed to allow participants to discuss educational goals, resolve conflicts, plan strategies for achievement, and evaluate student progress. An outline is presented that lists the purposes of the conference, explains the interrelationships of the participants, and describes three conference phases. These phases include: (1) pre-planning; (2) the conference; and (3) the conference follow-up. While the burden of the work involved falls mainly on the teacher (planning, assembling pertinent information, preparing conference agenda, etc.), suggestions are offered for involving students and parents in meaningful dialogue with each other and with the teacher. (JD)

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PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT CONFERENCE NETWORKS IN SECONDARY PROGRAMS:

A MODEL

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INTRODUCTION

Conferences in secondary education programs foster parent, teacher, and student partnerships in learning and are vital for disseminating information through networking processes. John Naisbitt in his bestseller, Megatrends, described networking as a vehicle for: (1) connecting people with one another; (2) getting people to talk to each other; (3) sharing ideas and information; and (4) using available resources. Thus, networking is a communication process which involves people and resource utilization in a variety of settings.

In today's "high tech" society, there are multifaceted networking systems in education. Within these systems, parent- teacher- student conferences continue to perform important functions. These conferences consist of interconnecting components which involve people communicating with each other. Conferences are mediums through which the participants are able to discuss educational goals, resolve conflict, plan strategies for achievement, and evaluate student progress.

Conference designs are as varied as the individuals who are responsible for planning them. However regardless of the design, management and organization of resources are necessary for a meaningful conference. Therefore, a conference that is carefully planned and executed becomes a powerful mechanism for disseminating information to the public.

To assist in conducting more meaningful conferences, a Parent-Teacher-Student Network Model has been designed. This model lists the purposes of a parent-teacher-student conference; explains the interrelationships of each component; and describes three conference phases. These phases include: (1) the preplanning phase, (2) the conference phase, and (3) the conference follow-up phase.

THE PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT CONFERENCE NETWORK MODEL

Purposes of the Parent-Teacher-Student Conference

The conference is designed to:

1. establish open lines of communication among the participants
2. disseminate information
3. evaluate student progress
4. provide an opportunity for teachers to obtain information about the student
5. provide an opportunity for the teacher to learn attitudes, expectations, and feelings which parents have concerning their child, the teacher, and the school
6. discuss students' strong and weak points
7. offer appropriate options for dealing with student concerns and/or problems
8. suggest ways in which the parent, teacher and student can work together as a team to solve problems and/or recommend challenging growth experiences
9. strengthen teachers' belief in students' capabilities
10. encourage students' belief in their abilities
11. inform parents about the teachers' sincere concern for students' progress
12. assess the level of parental assistance in the educational process

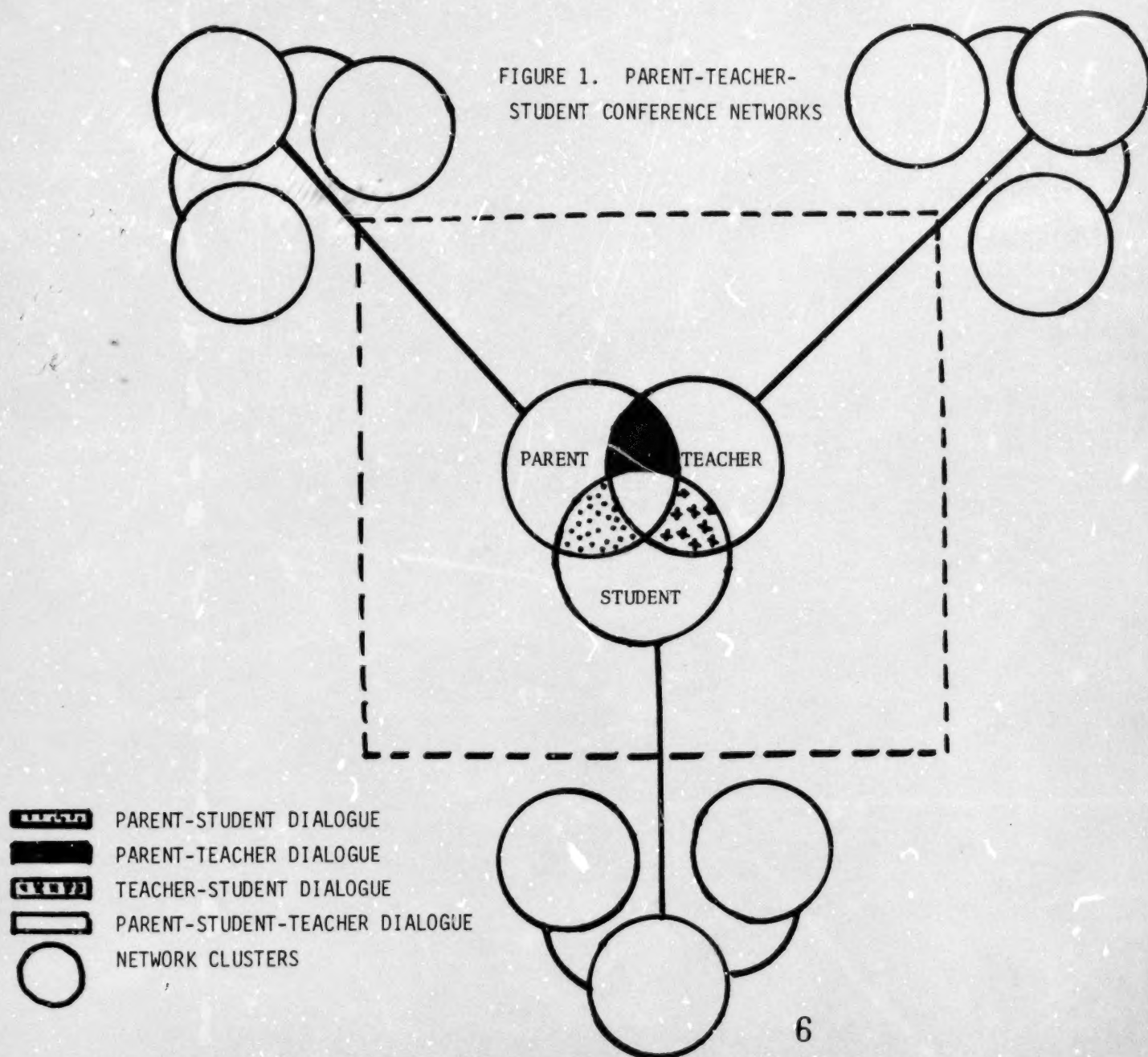
Interrelationships of Model Components

The model (Figure 1) depicts a parent, teacher, and student conference network. It shows the interrelationships between these primary components and other significant groups. Although each constituent has a specific role, the conference focus is on the student.

Dialogue is an important aspect of the parent-teacher-student model. During the conference, dialogue occurs between parent and student; parent and teacher; teacher and student; and parent, teacher and student. As a result, parents may discuss key issues of the conference with relatives, PTA members, concerned citizens, and others. Students may involve peers, acquaintances, members of student organizations, and others for feedback on conference outcomes. In addition, teachers may have dialogue with colleagues, administrator, counselors, and others. During these dialogues, an exchange of information occurs.

The involvement of additional persons may lead to increased input into the educational process. These support people may act as sounding boards for new policies or as change agents for old policies. As a result, the capacity of a conference to serve as a public relations tool is unlimited. Thus, the conference will function as a catalyst to increase individual and public awareness of program relevancy. The dialogue with support persons may also be helpful in orienting the core participants in a new direction not considered initially, thus, enhancing communication for future conferences. The ability of parents, teachers and students to communicate feelings, attitudes and knowledge among themselves and support persons is pertinent for the success of the conference network model.

FIGURE 1. PARENT-TEACHER-STUDENT CONFERENCE NETWORKS



Conference Phases

PHASE I- Preconference Planning

1. Update student file (locate and place all supporting materials in the student's file)
 - special assignments/projects
 - evaluations
 - attendance records
2. Clarify objectives/purpose for conference
3. Organize comments
 - student progress (strong/weak points and/or other pertinent/significant facts)
 - recommendations for improvement of weak points (if needed)
 - teacher expectations of student
4. Assemble pertinent information about the educational program
 - program goals/objectives
 - course offerings
 - length of course(s)
 - course sequence (to encourage enrollment in other courses of interest to him/her)
 - special class projects (provide list of resources needed)
5. Schedule conference
 - notify parent(s) and student (date, time, place)
 - choose environment conducive to conference
 - regulate length of conference (not longer than one hour)
6. Review conference documentation form
7. Initiate and conduct teacher-student conference
8. Inform school administration of conference plans
9. Plan for conference activities
 - tour department
 - refreshments
10. Prepare conference agenda
 - topics/issues to be discussed
 - conference format
 - pertinent questions

11. Determine availability of supplementary services that can be used to help solve problems that the student may be facing

counselor
community agencies
other school resource personnel
other resources

PHASE II - The Conference

1. Teachers set the stage for putting parents and students at ease
 - cordial welcome
 - friendly personality and attitude toward parent and student
 - explanation of conference format
2. Relaxer-Department Tour (initial conference)
 - discuss program (course offerings)
 - show student projects (if any)
 - interact with parent(s) on an informal basis
3. Restate conference goals/purposes
4. Present student assessment
 - indicate strong points
 - indicate weak points or areas that need improvement
 - recommend strategies to assist parent in helping student to improve where necessary
 - summarize strong points
 - entertain suggestions from parent(s) and student regarding teacher's assessment and recommendation
5. Entertain questions from parents and students
6. Listen to what is being said and observe nonverbal communication cues
7. Discuss teacher's expectations
8. Solicit parent's response to teacher's expectations
9. Encourage three-way dialogue among parent, student, and teacher
10. Record conference proceedings and outcome on Conference Documentation Forms
11. Obtain signatures of parent(s) and student
12. Sign Conference Form (Note future conference dates/time)

13. Maintain a feeling of mutual help and cooperative planning
14. Summarize results of conference
 - restate specific purposes of the conference
 - recall points of mutual agreement
 - review specific steps to be taken by the teacher to facilitate student progress
 - review steps to be taken by the parent and student to facilitate student progress
15. Provide the parent with a copy of the Conference Documentation Form

PHASE III - The Conference Follow-Up

1. Write thank-you letters to parent(s) and students
2. Make the necessary preparation for follow-through on suggestions made
3. Plan for follow-up conference
4. Repeat steps in Phases I and II

SUMMARY

The conference is a powerful communication tool and is an integral part of the networking process. The conference network, if used properly, can be a positive force in public relations and the dispersement of information about educational programs. Carefully planned and executed conferences with student, teacher, and parent involvement will provide opportunities to discuss information pertinent to student performance. The Parent-Teacher-Student Conference Network Model will provide additional direction for teachers in planning effective communication systems which involve parents and students.

REFERENCES

Naisbitt, J. Megatrends. New York: Warner Books, Inc., 1984.